

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I wanted to join both Senators from Arkansas in stating what an excellent choice Jim Sasser is for Ambassador to China.

I had the good fortune to be in Beijing this summer and to see firsthand the importance of that post which the President has chosen Senator Sasser to fill. I had the good fortune to serve here in the Senate for 12 years with Jim Sasser. I know of his great negotiating skills, his great leadership ability, and I believe his great advocacy skills, which will serve him well and serve this country well in this new position which he is about to take on.

So I think the Senate has acted very appropriately, the President has acted appropriately, and I look forward to the day when Jim Sasser is our representative, very soon, in Beijing. I again commend all Senators for voting for his nomination.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will return to legislative session.

#### APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES— H.R. 1561

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate insists on its amendment to H.R. 1561 and requests a conference with the House.

The Chair appointed Mr. HELMS, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. BROWN, Mr. COVERDELL, Mr. ASHCROFT, Mr. PELL, Mr. KERRY, Mr. SARBANES, and Mr. DODD conferees on the part of the Senate.

#### CUBAN LIBERTY AND DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY [LIBERTAD]

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair lays before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives on H.R. 927, Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act:

*Resolved*, That the House disagree to the amendment of the Senate to the bill to seek international sanctions against the Castro government in Cuba, to plan for support of a transition government leading to a democratically elected government in Cuba, and for other purposes, and ask a conference with the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon.

*Ordered*, That Mr. Gilman, Mr. Burton of Indiana, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, Mr. King, Mr. Diaz-Balart, Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Gejdenson, Mr. Torricelli, and Mr. Menendez be the managers of the conference on the part of the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate insists on its amendment and agrees to the request by the House for a conference.

The Chair appointed Mr. HELMS, Mr. COVERDELL, Mr. THOMPSON, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. PELL, Mr. DODD, and Mr. ROBB conferees on the part of the Senate.

#### DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1996—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the conference report to accompany H.R. 2099, the VA-HUD appropriations bill, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2099) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for fiscal year ending September 30, 1996, and for other purposes, having met, after full and free conference, have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by a majority of the conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of November 17, 1995.)

Mr. BOND addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank the Chair and my distinguished ranking member. We have before us the VA-HUD appropriations conference report. As I understand it, there is to be 30 minutes equally divided between the two managers, 10 minutes under the control of Senator BUMPERS, 10 minutes under the control of Senator BOXER, 10 minutes under the control of Senator HUTCHISON, 10 minutes under the control of Senator LAUTENBERG, and 10 minutes under the control of Senator MCCAIN.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, the Senate is not in order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct. The Senate will come to order. The Senator from Missouri has the floor.

Mr. BOND. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, it is with some pride, some relief, and some frustration, I now present to the Senate the conference report on the appropriations bill for the Departments of Veterans Affairs, and Housing and Urban Development, and independent agencies for fiscal year 1996. Consideration of this bill has been a long, difficult process. While we should have been able to complete our work long before now, I do believe we have wasted little of this time in producing the best possible measure for consideration by the Senate.

Work on this measure began over a year ago, beginning with analyses of budgetary trends and programmatic needs for activities under the subcommittee's jurisdiction. It was obvious at that time, that our Federal low-income housing programs were out of

budgetary control. Concerted policy reform was critical to avoid a disaster of unprecedented magnitude.

In January of this year, as the newly selected chairman of this subcommittee, I convened a series of special hearings on the budgetary and management crisis at HUD. We detailed the magnitude of our budgetary shortfall to maintain the existing multifamily subsidized housing inventory of the Department. We explored urgently needed reforms in the housing preservation program to reduce cost, avoid windfall payments, and reduce long-term rental subsidies. We also delineated policy changes in public housing to reduce bureaucratic overregulation and micromanagement, to increase local flexibility, decision-making, and efficiencies.

From these hearings we developed a strategy to begin these comprehensive changes in Federal housing programs. First, in the Disaster Supplemental and Rescission Act we initiated the first round of deregulation, and rescinded \$6.5 billion of previously appropriated HUD funds to turn-off the spigot of unsustainable housing subsidy commitments. At that time we noted the urgency of comprehensive housing authorization legislation to complete this reform effort during fiscal year 1996.

Unfortunately, this legislation has been delayed, although we remain hopeful that early next year the measures reported by both the House and Senate authorizing committees will pass the Congress. In the absence of such legislation, however, we have used the appropriations process to establish a strong foundation in beginning the major reform and overhaul of HUD. The measure before us today reflects almost all of the reform proposals which passed the Senate in September. They include public housing and assisted housing rent reforms, including a minimum rent, repeal for onerous Federal resident selection criteria, free-market decontrol of section 8 lease terms, and flexibility in resident income mix and funds utilization.

This measure maintains the Senate-passed public housing demonstration initiative which will allow up to 30 public housing authorities to combine public housing and section 8 subsidies into a locally determined low-income housing assistance block grant. In addition, the bill also includes the Senate proposed multifamily mark-to-market demonstration, which is discretionary authority for the Department, and willing apartment development owners, the opportunity to explore work-out strategies which reduce dependence on rental subsidies while preserving affordable housing. Coupled with the one-time, 1-year extension of expiring project-based subsidy contracts, the multifamily housing demonstration authority sets the stage for consideration and enactment of needed comprehensive reform legislation next year.

Mr. President, the measure before us also maintains the effort recommended